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## What are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) parents' perceived experience of inclusiveness in their child's preschool classroom?

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Carla Haggard  
What are lesbian, gay, bisexual,  
transgender, and queer (LGBTQ)  
parents' perceived experience of  
inclusiveness in their child's  
preschool classroom?

## **ABSTRACT**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) parents are more visible now than ever before due to reduced stigma. Preschool is often children and family's first introduction to the school system and families outside of their social network. This mixed method research study examines the perceived experiences of inclusiveness or non-inclusiveness for LGBTQ families in their child's preschool classroom. This study presents data from 70 self-identified LGBTQ parents with a child who has been in preschool within the past year in the United States.

Parents in this study often felt that their child's preschool was inclusive of their family structure and many stated that it was a "non-issue" and they were treated the same as every other family. When asked about times parents felt the school was inclusive or not inclusive of their family structure, parents often reported small moments with teachers, administrators, parents, or their child's classmates as notable moments, such as teacher's allowing time for their child to make an extra Mother's Day card, another parent stating that she was "excited to meet your partner", or an example of non-inclusiveness when a teacher who ignored a child calling a female parent a "dad". Some participants also reported that issues such as adoption or biracial issues were more difficult than their LGBTQ identity.

**WHAT ARE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER (LGBTQ)  
PARENTS' PERCEIVED EXPERIENCE IN THEIR CHILD'S PRESCHOOL  
CLASSROOM?**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Carla Haggard

Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2014

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

American poet and essayist Adrienne Rich (1984) wrote, “When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you’re not in it, there’s a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.” Children of LGBTQ parents in preschool and other school classrooms where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) families are not included and visible may face these moments of disequilibrium daily.

Over the last decade there has been a noticeable shift in media and public thought around acceptance of and rights for those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). LGBTQ characters can be seen on popular network TV shows, same sex marriage has been allowed in numerous states, and Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell was repealed in the summer of 2013. The treatment of LGBTQ students in schools has continued to be an issue, with common knowledge rising in the last decade regarding the disproportionate number of youth suicides or attempted suicides due to bullying related to a real or perceived LGBTQ identity. Movements such as the “It Gets Better” project, endorsed by various celebrities and professional sports teams, and anti-bullying campaigns have attempted to create more inclusive environments for LGBTQ youth in K-12 grades and reduce homophobia in schools.

According to the US Census Bureau (2011), there are 600,000 reported same-sex households, 20% of which have children. It is likely that the number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) parents is in fact even higher than what is reported due to

concerns over such things as safety, stigma, and being an un-partnered LGBTQ parent. LGBTQ parents have always existed, but they are becoming increasingly more visible due to reduced stigma and access to donor insemination, surrogacy, and adoption (Fedewa & Clark, 2009). Public opinion on gay marriage and other LGBTQ issues has shifted over the past decade, yet stigma and homophobia still exist for LGBTQ families.

Preschool is often children's first entrance into the school system and their first introduction to families who are different than their own. While LGBTQ parents have always been present in preschools, the reduced stigma around this identification will likely result in LGBTQ-headed families being more visible in the preschool classroom. Ensuring that preschool classrooms are welcoming and inclusive to all family structures, and LGBTQ headed families in particular, may help reduce homophobia before it begins by normalizing different family structures. Creating welcoming and inclusive environments also helps to ensure that children and families undergo less stress as they navigate this shift into the school system.

This study will examine the experience of LGBTQ parents at their child's preschool to determine what things may have helped it feel inclusive or resulted in it feeling less inclusive. Much of the recent literature in this area has focused on teachers' attempts at making classrooms inclusive, and often are focused on the Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade range. Preschool is often children's first introduction to school and families other than their own, and is often a time when families are even more involved in their child's schooling and in the classroom in particular. It is the intent of this study to research parent's perception of their child's preschool as inclusive or non-inclusive environment, thereby expanding the knowledge base for educators, administrators, and social workers who work in schools and with families of young children, to see what really works and does not work and how to advocate for truly inclusive environments for those they

serve. This research studied 70 LGBTQ identified parents of children who were in preschool within the last year through an anonymous online survey to learn more about their perceptions of the inclusiveness of their child's preschool.

A comprehensive review of recent literature will be discussed in Chapter II, followed by the methodology of this study in Chapter III, the finding of the study will be discussed in Chapter IV, and Chapter V will cover a discussion and conclusion of these findings in relation to the previous literature.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Education, social work, and LGBTQ families**

Logie, Bridge, and Bridge (2007) created the LGBT Assessment Scale (LGBTAS) to measure the attitudes, phobias, and cultural competence of masters in social work (MSW) students toward the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Their assessment scale was made up of twenty-six Likert-scaled questions, 13 of which measured homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, these are defined as negative feelings, attitudes, behaviors and fears towards homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender identities and/or those who occupy these identities; 9 measured attitudes toward LGBT populations, and 4 measured cultural competence in working with LGBT populations. The items were taken from previously verified scales used to measure these components, including Bouton et al's (1987) homophobia scale, Hudson and Rickets (1992) Index of Attitudes toward Homosexuals (IAH), Greene and Herek's (1994) Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG), and the Inventory for Assessing the Process of Cultural Competence Among Health Care Professionals (IAPCC). Most items were modified from their original scale to include bisexual and transgender issues as well as be relevant to social work practice specifically. The researchers administered this verified assessment scale to 173 MSW students at a university in the Midwestern portion of the United States during their final winter semester in 2003. According to Logie, Bridge, and Bridge's findings, "the majority of MSW students reported low phobia and a positive attitude toward LGBT populations, yet participants reported having a low level of cultural competence in serving

LGBT clients.” The researchers suggest that further education and training is needed for MSW students to serve the LGBT community effectively.

The cultural competence component section of this scale did not include separate categories for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender competency. Participants answered questions such as “I am knowledgeable about the issues and challenges facing LGBT people and feel competent in my ability to work effectively with this population,” which may differ from answer to items asking specifically about these populations individually. This study was also conducted in 2003, over ten years ago. Mainstream medias inclusion of LGBT characters have increased during this span and MSW Programs may have adjusted curriculum as well.

Social work journals are a place where postgraduate social workers and faculty in MSW programs may look to expand their education and training, however the mainstream social work journals often have limited research articles pertaining to the LGBTQ community. Scherrer and Woodford (2013) did a content analysis of the six large social work journals: *Child Welfare*, *Families in Society*, *Research on Social Work Practice*, *Social Service Review*, *Social Work*, and *Social Work Research* to determine the number of full length articles with LGBTQ topics during the years of 1998-2007. Reviewing this 10-year span resulted in only 56 full-length articles discussing LGBTQ related topics, 2.6% of the total articles in these combined journals during that span.

It is unclear whether the limited number of LGBTQ featured articles is due to editors of these journals being more partial to other content or if researchers chose to submit their LGBTQ centered articles to journals focused specifically on LGBTQ topics. The research acknowledges that it lays in the hands of both writers and journal editors to increase the percentage of articles on LGBTQ issues in mainstream journals. The researchers only looked at mainstream journals

and so it is unknown if the number of niche journals looking specifically at LGBTQ issues may have increased during that same 10-year span, resulting in more articles overall on these topics.

Herbstrieth, Tobin, et al (2013) conducted a quantitative study at a midwestern university to determine people's discomfort with gay and lesbian couples and families. Their study involved 562 participants, 126 of which identified as male. 266 of these were pre-service teachers enrolled in a psychology course, the remainder of which was other students from the psychology department subject pool, no significant differences were found between pre-service teachers and other participants. Respondents were 90% Caucasian and 535 identified as heterosexual. The study involves participants being shown a stimulus on a screen, then an "ambiguous figure" of a Chinese character, respondents were then asked to rate the Chinese character as pleasant or not pleasant, and then the process would repeat with a different stimulus. The stimulus shown to participants included 12 pictures of gay couples kissing, 12 pictures of lesbian couples kissing, 12 pictures of straight couples kissing, 12 pictures of gay headed families, 12 pictures of lesbian-head families, and 12 pictures of heterosexual headed families. All people in these stimuli photographs were Caucasian in an attempt to reduce the possibility of racially motivated responses. Potential participants who stated that they could read Chinese characters were also excluded in an attempt to ensure that the Chinese character, which participants were rating as pleasant or unpleasant, would remain ambiguous and neutral stimuli.

The researchers found that gay and lesbian couples kissing and gay and lesbian families were rated unpleasant more than their heterosexual counterparts. This study also found that gay men kissing and gay-headed families were rated unpleasant more than any other stimuli.

This research's findings point to a continued discomfort with lesbian and gay couples and families, especially gay men. Gay men and gay headed families may be at even more risk for

homophobic treatment, and being unwelcomed in certain settings. The pre-service teacher and psychology undergrad participants in the sample point to a possibility of this discomfort being present as these future teachers enter classrooms of their own.

The study's sample consists of college students from one college in the Midwest. Results may differ for students in different schools and in different locations across the country.

Associations but not causal relations can be drawn between participants' responses to the neutral stimuli and the photograph shown prior to the stimuli.

Teachers and social workers across the country come into contact with LGBTQ-headed families regularly, though they may not always be known as such due to assumptions of heterosexuality in general, due to the lack of a partner making sexual orientation less obvious, or simply a parent choosing to not disclose their sexuality due to a variety of concerns. Teacher education programs and social work schools often require students to be trained in multiculturalism and diversity, however LGBTQ issues are regularly ignored or overlooked in these trainings (Suoto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008; Downs & James, 2006).

Teachers and social workers struggle with uncertainty about how to address LGBTQ issues and family structures, and even whether or not it is appropriate to address these topics with young children (Logie, Bridge, & Bridge, 2007).

Martino and Cumming-Potvin's (2011) research involved a qualitative case study examining two Australian elementary school teachers' reflections on using books that feature same-sex families and same-sex relationships in their classroom. The teachers were found using a snowball method, which involved the first participant, a teacher known by one of the authors, and then approaching other teachers she knew to find the second participant. The teachers were provided with the children's books with same-sex relationships to review two weeks prior to an

interview. A semi-structured interview then took place in which researchers asked about the teachers' approaches to social justice and literacy in the classroom, and allowed the teachers to discuss reactions to the literature that had been provided.

Their research found that the teachers showed concerns over using picture books with lesbian and gay parents as well as a picture book based on a true story which features two male penguins who nurture an abandoned egg and raise the baby penguin as their own, as potentially inappropriate for kindergarten and first graders. Teachers continued to show concerns over the appropriateness of the topics even when aware that such family structures might exist in their classroom. This same book, *And Tango Makes Three*, has been on the Most Banned Books list for a number of years since it was first published. Teachers have also expressed concerns over negative responses from other parents and school administrators for acknowledging different types of families in the K-12 classroom (Soloff, 2001; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011). This study took place in Australia where views of LGBTQ inclusion may differ from the U.S. though the teachers studied did echo concerns mentioned in previous studies in the United States (Casper & Schultz, 1999; Suoto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2007). Due to the small sample size the results are not generalizable but do point to possible concerns teachers may face when deciding to incorporate such literature into their classroom.

### **Child development and the social-emotional needs of pre-school children**

Research has shown that a huge growth in brain development happens in the first five years, sparking an influx of state supported preschool programs and a large number of children in the United States attending preschool. There are a number of theories about how young children learn, including that of Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky developed a number of widely accepted theories on child development; one of the most well known is his sociocultural theory and what

he refers to as scaffolding children's learning. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory states, "cognition is a profoundly social phenomenon. Social experiences shape the ways of thinking and interpreting the world available to individuals" (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Preschool children are enveloped in a world of socialization through play, often for the first time in a setting outside of their family and close family friends (Serpell and Mashburn, 2012). One of their most important tasks in the preschool years is to develop more social competence to prepare them for life and the school years ahead (Katz & McClellan, 1997). Vygotsky believed that children learn most when their learning is facilitated by someone wiser, the teacher or other adults in their life, who can scaffold their learning from outside of what they already know into a place of new understanding just outside of their current abilities to think on their own (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Fantasy play, one of the main components of all preschool classrooms, gives children the most opportunities to develop and children have been shown to often play above their normal level of development. Play has also been shown to "contain all developmental tendencies in a condensed form...in creating an imaginary situation, children learn to act not just on a response to external stimuli, but also internal ideas or the meaning of a situation" (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Play is often the central component of preschool classrooms. Preschools and elementary schools that allow for play that welcome and includes various family structures, such as playing "house" with children pretending there are two dads, or allowing for and encouraging behaviors and play outside of socialized gender norms can help children learn and grow and may increase children's acceptance of these realities both inside and outside of the classroom.

Casper and Schultz (1999) studied lesbian and gay parents and their teachers to see what issues arise in schools, how play and classrooms influenced children and families, and to provide suggestions for what could be done to make things more inclusive. Casper and Shultz's research

involved a 3-year ethnographic study of the educational interactions of lesbian and gay parent's and their young children's educators. Snowball sampling methods were used to find 17 gay and lesbian parents in the greater New York-Tri-State Area from 1989-1992. Participants identified as middle class, working class, and one in poverty and of Caucasian, African American, and Latino/a ethnicities. The samples were triadic when possible including the child's parent(s), teacher, and school administrator, though some families chose not to have school personnel interviewed because they did not want to disclose their orientation. Twenty educators in total were also interviewed. Some participants were interviewed two to three years later. Interviews consisted of open-ended questions that allowed for in depth responses about parents and educators experiences.

The researchers were faced with a repeated question from teachers in their research about whether curriculum and school environments that are inclusive of LGBTQ families are "developmentally appropriate" for young children. Casper and Schultz responded by referring to Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky (1978), children do not just wait for development to happen they create these moments in play where they are "tugging at development" and looking to grasp and understand the world around them. Children are using dramatic play to explore and understand the world inside and outside their school, and it is the teachers' and schools' role to facilitate a fuller understanding of this world. Stepping into a preschool classroom and observing imaginary play and conversations will likely result in witnessing a number of ways in which families are being constantly constructed and reconstructed on a daily basis (Casper & Schultz, 1999). Preschool classrooms in which all families are welcome, and teachers are listening for and open to opportunities to challenge children to explore outside of what they might already know, by suggesting for instance that when two girls struggle with who will be the

“mom” in their play family that in fact both could be the mom, or by reading books which show multiple types of families they encourage their students to learn and grow.

According to Katz and McClellan (1997), “teacher’s openness to children, parents, and the cultures represented in their classroom influences the overall effectiveness of teaching and their ability to foster children’s social development in general. Casper and Schultz also noted that studies about other issues of diversity, such as ethnicity, have shown that children feel more secure, safe, and open when they are shown “mirrors of their identity” through dolls, books, and other materials that reflect people who look like them, which is believed to be true for children of LGBTQ-headed families as well (1999).

Casper and Schultz study took place between 1989-1992, making their data over 20 years old. Public opinion on gay marriage in particular has changed drastically in the past 20 years, as has acceptance of same-sex couples. The same study undertaken currently might therefore provide different results.

### **Parental engagement**

Studies show that parental engagement in children’s schools is important. Children’s academic and social skills as well as literacy skills have been shown to improve when there are strong ties between children’s families and their schools (Serpell & Mashburn, 2012; Herbstrith, Tobin et. al, 2013).

Serpell and Mashburn’s (2012) research involved a diverse group of 2,966 four year olds and their teachers in state funded pre-k programs. Participants were drawn from two large-scale studies of state funded pre-k programs, one of which included a stratified random sample of 40 state-funded pre-k programs within Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, and regions of New York and California during 2001-2002. From each of these programs one pre-k classroom was



randomly selected, totaling 240 classrooms overall. The second study involved a stratified sample of 100 state funded pre-k programs within Massachusetts, New Jersey, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin during 2003-2004. Similarly, in this study one classroom was randomly selected, resulting in a total of 500 classrooms.

Parents of students in these classrooms were given a demographic questionnaire and contact information sheet. Family-School Connectedness was assessed by trying to understand the quality of the relationship between the parents and teachers as well as the frequency of contact between parents and teachers. In the spring teachers were asked to rate the relationship quality by filling out a home-school relationship questionnaire as well as rating the frequency of different types of contact with the parents. In the fall and spring of pre-k and in the fall of kindergarten, the teachers completed a behavior rating scale assessing the child's social-emotional development as well as a teacher relationship scale to assess the teacher's view of their relationship with the student.

The researchers found that there was a positive association between children whose teacher's reported having higher quality relationships with their parents and also being rated by teachers as more socially competent, as having fewer behavior problems, and as having a closer relationship with the teacher. A higher frequency of contact between parent and teacher was associated with children who were rated as having lower social competence and higher behavior problem ratings by their kindergarten teacher. The researchers point to the quality of the teacher-parent relationship being of higher importance than the frequency of contact between teacher and parent as increased contact was usually due to problems. Researchers also found that lower teacher ratings in the quality of teacher-parent relationship had a stronger negative correlation

with teachers' perception of problem behaviors for children that had a history of problem behavior, male children, African American children, and those categorized as poor.

This study used only teacher feedback to determine the quality of the relationship and teacher and parent reports of relationships may not be congruent. Teacher reports of social skills are also subjective and may not acutely reflect social skills and behavior problems. The study also shows associations between these different behaviors and cannot be used to determine the cause of the relationship between parents and teachers.

The researchers describe the early childhood classroom as “the first intersection between the socializing ecologies of home and school and offer a critical point of interaction”. As children advance through the elementary school years the opportunities for parents to be active participants and facilitate a deeper relationship with the school lessen. The preschool years can help set a stage for ongoing parent-teacher relationships and as Serpell and Mashburn found in their study, can help create an “early, shared agenda...warmth and trust can be used as a basis for reconciling differences in the cultures of home and school” (2012). Serpell and Mashburn's study was conducted using heterosexual parents and leave room for further research into the quality of relationships that may be formed when parents occupy other marginalized spaces, such as LGBTQ identified parents.

Fedewa and Clark (2009) wanted to see how same sex families and heterosexual families compared in relation to the home-school environment. The researchers found a sample of 35 same sex parents and 35 heterosexual families from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), a national sample of kindergarteners attending public and private kindergartens and early childhood programs in 1998. The researchers reviewed and compared the data from the 70 families, which included a baseline assessment in Fall 1998 in

which parents, guardians, teachers, and school administrators were given questionnaires regarding the children, the parents' backgrounds, and the school and follow up assessments conducted when children were in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. They analyzed data to determine the home-school partnership, which was determined by responses parents gave regarding their attendance at school events, volunteering for school, the school providing parent's with information about their child, school helping parents understand their child, and school providing opportunities for parents to volunteer as well. They also analyzed data to determine children's outcomes by reviewing responses parents gave about their child's social skills, social interactions, self-control, and loneliness as well as results from oral academic tests of math and reading skills given to the children in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The researchers used t-tests to analyze differences between heterosexual and same sex parents to determine if they had different levels of home-school partnerships. The researchers also compared home-school partnerships together with child outcomes between same sex and heterosexual parents to see if a stronger home-school partnership was more important for academic and social success for children of same sex-parents given the stigma and stress that may be associated with these families. Their analysis of this data showed that the level of home-school partnership was the same regardless of sexual orientation, showing a mean score of 7.4 for same sex and 7.7 for heterosexual families out of 16. The researchers found that a strong home-school partnership was equally important for all families as well. The researchers encourage schools to help create welcoming environments that allow for these strong home-school partnerships, such as providing opportunities for parents to volunteer and social activities for families to become involved with the school.

Fedewa and Clark's analyzed data from the ECLS-K study but did not speak with their sample participants and the sexual orientation of parents was never explicitly asked. The researchers determined which families were "same sex" families by locating cohort members in which more than one person identified as father or mother to one child and were living together. It is unknown how these parents chose to identify or if they came out to their child's teachers and school. Parents who participated in the ECLS-K study also had to agree to be part of the study for multiple years and participate in various surveys and interviews. Participants who agreed to be a part of the ECLS-K study therefore may have been more likely or had more time than the general population to engage and interact with the school given these requirements for participation.

Mercier and Harold (2003) researched lesbian parents' experience at their child's school in the Midwest in a mixed method study. Researchers recruited a non-representative group of lesbian parents in a midwestern state over 6 months to take a questionnaire about how they became parents. They found participants for the questionnaire using a modified snowball method, which involved recruiting groups of lesbian parents they were already in contact with and then asking these participants to forward the questionnaire on to other lesbian parents they knew. Out of the 125 completed questionnaires a subsample of 21 participants who had agreed to be interviewed was chosen. Mercier and Harold tried to reflect the diversity in the questionnaire sample in their subsample as well. The age range of interview participant's children were from 6 months-17 years of age, included 15 families, 13 of which had children currently in school. Six of these children were in preschool; twenty of the children were in kindergarten. Interview questions related to the relationships between the families and their child's school as well as reactions and feelings about this relationship, sources of stress, and support.

Eighty percent of mothers reported a positive relationship with their child's school. Mercier and Harold point out that these mothers did a large amount of work to nurture these relationships and had a high level of parent involvement, creating room for further study around the difference between the amount of work lesbian mothers and gay fathers do to nurture relationships versus their heterosexual counterparts. When asked about their reason for choosing a school they found that participants of their study valued diversity and tolerance around racial, ethnic, cultural and other types when looking for a school and would travel further to find schools with diversity, even if it was only racial diversity. This result may be strongly influenced by the fact that many of the respondents were white with children of color.

The study also found that "most respondents reported concerns about managing the interactions between family and school systems." These interactions included being concerned about reactions of other parents, such as their children not being invited over to other children's houses or not being included in activities. Parents expressed more explicitly concerns related to the impact on their kids or lack of acceptance due to other parents' reactions than they did about the reactions of school faculty and staff.

Parents also reported some stress related to coming out as well and teacher's reactions. One interesting finding was that lesbian moms who were not currently partnered reported having their sexual orientation be invisible, due to an assumed heterosexual identity by teachers and administrators. Invisibility was also a theme for some non-biological parents of children, as teachers were not aware of, or did not acknowledge them as a parent of the child, deferring to the biological mother.

Mercier's and Harold's sample size was 86% white, and most participants often had a higher than average income, were college educated, and were employed lesbian mothers. Given these limitations, generalizations to more diverse groups is not possible.

Women in their study reported a "surprisingly high level of openness and assertiveness" in creating positive teacher/parent relationships and providing resources to their child's classroom (2003). Some parents in Fedewa and Clarks' (2009) study of parent/school relationships however, stated that they believed it was the responsibility of the school, not parents, to create a positive learning environment and climate. Many of the mothers in Mercier and Harold's study also prioritized schools that were known for a commitment to diversity, even if only related to ethnicity and socioeconomic status instead of family structure, or were in more urban areas that would naturally be more diverse, even when choosing that school would mean adding long commutes or consume other types of energy.

Goldberg and Smith (2014) surveyed 105 families whose only child was adopted and currently in preschool to determine what factors were important when selecting a preschool. One-third of these families identified as lesbian headed families, one-third identified as gay headed families, and one-third identified as heterosexual headed families. The most common response on what contributed to a family's preschool choice was the educational philosophy of the preschool across family types, for gay and lesbian headed families the preschool being gay-friendly was the second highest response. Goldberg and Smith reported that their sample size was 91% white, had a higher than average income compared to the national estimate for same sex and heterosexual adoptive couples, and a large majority of participants had a bachelor's degree or higher. Results of their study cannot be generalized to parents in other socioeconomic and racial categories.

Clay (2004) surveyed seven same sex parents at the school in which he was employed. He found that parents stated that other issues, such as discussing adoptive families at the school, were often bigger concerns than being a same sex family. Clay found, similar to previously mentioned studies, that being part of the general community and having visible diversity in the classroom were important to the families he surveyed. One parent however noted a distinction between inclusion, and acceptance. This parent noted that relationships with other parents had been one of the major concerns and that the schools needs to help serve as a bridge by creating a gay friendly community and events that steps beyond just inclusions to true feelings of acceptance in the school community. Clay's sample size was small and was drawn from one school; therefore results cannot be generalized. Clay was also on staff at the school which the families attended, which may have influenced their responses.

### **Current strategies for inclusion**

In their book, *Gay Parents/Straight Schools*, Casper and Schultz (1999) offer a number of ideas for inclusive school environments based on their research of parents and schools. They encourage schools and administrators to create emergency forms, enrollment forms, and other materials that do not include vocabulary such as "mother/father" on forms, which reinforces heteronormativity, the view that heterosexuality is the "normal" and preferred sexual orientation as opposed to one of many possible orientations. Forms should instead refer to parent/guardian, and to support teachers and families as they try to incorporate LGBTQ families in their school community and classrooms. Casper and Schultz encourage teachers to have books that feature all types of families and to be aware and active in children's dramatic play, which is fertile ground for development and learning and where issues of family and gender roles play out regularly.

Including picture books that feature same sex families may be one of the simplest ways to start to create an inclusive classroom environment. According to Rowell (2007), “A lack of inclusive gay-friendly picture books means some children cannot see their own lives or the full diversity of family life reflected in books.” This literature contributes to validating many young children’s lives and decreasing homophobia. As stated previously, incorporating picture books is not always the easiest task as teachers worry that other parents might have negative reactions. Another barrier to incorporating books may be the limited availability of such books.

Spence (2000) surveyed the holdings of public library systems in one city of each of the 50 United States, one in each of the Canadian provinces, and one in Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain for 30 different picture books that contained gay characters. Spence found that many libraries only contained a small number of these titles as well as a small number of copies of the titles they did carry. Spence also found that many of the picture books were outdated and currently unavailable in print, making replacing any lost or damaged books impossible. While Spence’s research took place in 2000 when the number of picture books featuring LGBT characters available was smaller, the issue of books going out of print or hard to find may still be a problem. Spence’s research also shows that the San Francisco library, in what is assumed to be one of the more gay friendly parts of the United States, was not in the top 10 when ranked by number of gay friendly picture books per 100,000 residents.

Spence’s study was done over 14 years ago, since that time public library holdings of LGBTQ books, as well as the number of different books available may have increased. Teachers and schools may also choose to purchase books rather than access them through public libraries.

Casper and Schultz (1999) found, as did Mercier and Harold (2003) that one of parents biggest issues was getting teachers to ask questions about their families and how they could work



together or incorporate their family into the school. Many teachers in their study did however make attempts to incorporate same sex families when information about same sex families being in their classroom is brought to their attention.

Suoto-Manning and Hermann-Wilmath (2008) used their own classrooms as case studies for incorporating LGBTQ issues into their curriculum. Their qualitative first person action research took place in the first grade classroom taught by author Suoto-Manning. Suoto-Manning identifies as a heterosexual mother and teacher at a Title I school in the South Eastern United States. Seventy percent of children at the school are qualified for free/reduced cost lunch, however Suoto-Manning describes the socio-economic class of her particular students as “varied from living in housing projects to million dollar homes”. Suoto-Manning was interested in looking at ways in which she embraces the topic of gay and lesbian families in her classroom after having a student in her classroom for the first time, to her knowledge, with a biological mother and father who were divorced and whose mother was living with a same sex partner. Suoto-Manning used journal entries to continuously document, question, and think critically about the work she was doing in her classroom after realizing that this student was being left out of play activities during recess and was experiencing bullying comments about his family structure.

Suoto-Manning used her own pregnancy as an entry into a classroom study on different types of families. Suoto-Manning shared books about families with her classroom, which include various types of families including LGBTQ families, single parent families, adoptive families, and grandparent led families. Suoto-Manning had students draw pictures of their family and then drew a picture of her own family, purposefully including her gay uncle and his partner, asking students, “does your family look like mine?” In this classroom conversation

Suoto-Manning was able to address children's discomfort with same-sex partnerships by speaking about how much she cares for her uncles and felt hurt when students said negative things about them. Throughout this project Suoto-Manning repeated a request for students to be respectful of all families, even if they are not like your own. Her study found that her students showed signs of increased tolerance for families other than their own and would often repeat to other students as well as their own families, the need to respect all families. Suoto-Manning observed that after classroom curriculum was introduced, students often used single parent and divorced families as examples of why all families should be respected when the subject of same-sex families was brought up or debated. Suoto-Manning was also able to document moments in the midst of this study where students who normally did not engage with the student with a lesbian mother, asked him to play.

The authors state that, "by talking openly about issues [in the classroom and with families] students are more likely to embrace diversity. Suoto-Manning's action research involved only her own work in one first grade classroom so findings about the effects of using children's books about families, promoting tolerance for all types of families, and using her own family as a starting point for conversation as helpful in increasing understanding about multiple types of families and reducing bullying, cannot be generalized. The work these researchers did can be used however as a catalyst for increased conversation and curriculum ideas that other teachers can try to replicate in their own classroom.

The recent focus on bullying in schools is often used by schools and teachers as a way to introduce LGBTQ themes and families into their curriculum in ways that may make it easier to digest in more conservative communities or for teachers' less comfortable with the topic. Martino and Cumming-Potvin's (2011) study, mentioned previously, talked with teachers about

the use of picture books featuring LGBTQ characters and found that many of the teachers found using bullying as an easy tool to introduce the books into their curriculum, even when they reported some discomfort with the topic otherwise. Martino and Cumming-Potvin critique the use of bullying to address LGBTQ families however as they feel “homophobia as a discourse centers heterosexism as ‘normal’”. It may be ideal however to address both homophobia, as it has shown to be rampant in schools (Burdge et al, 2013), as well as normalizing LGBTQ families. Starting in preschool to normalize LGBTQ families may provide the opportunity to fight homophobia before it begins.

### **Gaps in research**

Studies often look at teachers’ views of LGBTQ families and curriculum in the classroom but they rarely look at the families’ view of these same interactions. There are also studies of teacher’s perceptions of school/family relationships, but not specifically for LGBTQ families. The few studies that do focus on LGBTQ families and schools from the parents’ perspective take place in the K-12 educational system (Casper & Shultz, 1999; Mercier & Harold, 2003) and often have a small sample size (Clay, 2004; Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmath, 2008), making the ability to generalize the findings difficult. Research on the experiences of same sex parents of preschool children or their teachers, often have even smaller sample sizes, are written from singular case studies of one teacher’s experience, focus on one particular preschool program, or have focused solely on lesbian mothers. Research studies thus far have also included primarily white middle class families in numbers disproportionate to the population.

Studies have shown that the school/family relationship is incredibly important for the child’s future success, as is having a welcoming and inclusive environment. This study fills a gap in looking at children and families first experience with school in their child’s preschool,

from the parent's perspective, which is so often overlooked. In the Bay Area and across the country work has been done to create more inclusive classrooms and educate local teachers around LGBTQ issues. How do the parents' perceive these efforts? Are the positive relationships the teachers' are hoping to create being felt by the LGBTQ parents? Why or why not?

This study was also designed to incorporate the experiences of bisexual, transgender, and queer voices of parents who are often left out of previous studies. Questions were also inspired by findings of previous research to test these findings for validity within this sample.

The following chapter, Methodology, will discuss the research design, recruitment process, and sample.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Research purpose and design**

This research project is aimed at exploring Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) parents' experience with their child's preschool. This research project asks specifically, what are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) parents perceived experiences of inclusiveness in their child's preschool? This research studies how preschool parents who identify as LGBTQ have felt included and/or excluded in their child's preschool classroom due to their family structure/sexual orientation. Previous studies have explored teacher's attempts at creating inclusive classroom but often do not focus on the parents' experiences of these attempts, or if so, study K-12 schools (Martino & Cumming, 2011; Souto-Manning, & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008; Downs & James, 2006; Burdge et al, 2013; Peterson, 2003). Preschool is often parents' first interaction with the school environment and childrens' first introduction to a variety of families different from their own. Preschool is also a time when families often interact more with the school and teachers. Participants will be asked a range of survey questions to determine what their experiences were and what steps were taken in their preschools to create an inclusive environment.

This research used an online survey of short answer questions given to self-identified LGBTQ parents whose child is currently in preschool or who was attending preschool within the last year. The survey questions included demographics regarding the parent's sexual orientation and if the parent identified as transgender. The geographic location of the child's preschool was

also requested to note possible differences in responses based on location. Respondents were given lists of particular items that are believed promote inclusiveness in other studies (Casper & Schultz, 1999; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011; Mercier & Harold, 2003), such as forms labeled Parent/Guardian instead of Mother/Father and the availability of picture books in the classroom featuring LGBTQ families. Respondents were asked to mark whether these were available at their child's school. Participants were also asked short answer questions about factors that influenced their school choice, the ways in which their family handled disclosure of their family structure, what helped them feel more included, and which situations made them feel less included (see Appendix C).

Given the limited time and energy of most families with young children, an online survey was used in an effort to allow for greater participation. Online surveys can be completed at parent's convenience and during unconventional meeting times when children are asleep and parents have a moment of free time.

Although this study was open to participants nationwide, participants came from large metropolitan areas, such as the San Francisco Bay Area. The San Francisco Bay Area is known for its' welcoming stance towards the LGBTQ community and advocacy work is already in place concerning LGBTQ led families in the schools. The ways in which schools and teachers feel that they can be inclusive and welcoming, and the ability for parents to be open about their family structure and advocate for their families while ensuring their own safety may vary when comparing respondents in the Bay Area to those in more conservative areas of the country, greatly limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions. In seeing what has been successful and unsuccessful in creating inclusive environments in the Bay Area, however, can hopefully help those in other parts of the country learn about changes they can make, both inside

the constraints of and against the constraints of their current system, to advocate for LGBTQ families in other areas.

### **Sample**

Participants were selected based on meeting the following criteria: parents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ) who have a child who is currently enrolled in preschool, or whose child was enrolled in a preschool in the last year in the United States. Parents who do not identify as LGBTQ were not included. This study asks respondents to reflect on and remember specific aspects of their child's preschool classroom, the enrollment process of filling out forms and paperwork, and other events from their child's preschool years. In order to maintain the likelihood that participants will be able to accurately recall these aspects, parents whose child has been out of preschool for more than one year were excluded from the study. Participants were also asked to list the geographic location of their child's preschool to allow for comparison of responses based on location.

**Table 1: Geographic location of preschool attended by participant's child**

<b>Geographic location</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
San Francisco Bay Area	20
Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN	18
New England Cities (MA, MD, ME, NJ, NY, VT)	16
Atlanta, GA	4
Other cities in California	4
Tallahassee, FL	1
Dallas, TX	1
Tulsa, OK	1
Did not give location of preschool	5

The research sample is made up of 70 parents who completed the survey. Of the 70 parents, 4 participants said “yes” when asked if they identify as transgender, one responded no and under “other” stated that he is a “man of transsexual experience”, and one marked only “other” stating “yes, but not transsexual”. When asked to describe their sexual orientation, 36 respondents identified as lesbian, 7 identified as gay, 10 identified as bisexual, and 20 identified as queer. One respondent who marked “queer” as their sexual orientation also put “fluid” in the comment section, another respondent who had stated that they identified as transgender marked queer but also commented that he identified as straight. The researcher chose to include the term “queer” and a comment box to allow for respondents to self-identify due to the researchers own knowledge of queer being a preferred identity for some in the LGBTQ community. This choice was made purposely due to the researcher’s value on self-naming despite that it may mask an even larger percentage of female identified same-sex parents participating in the study or the



presence of more male identified same-sex parents responses. Female same-sex parents tend to be overrepresented in research studies on same sex families and make up over half of this survey. The largest number of responses came from the San Francisco Bay Area with 20 respondents listing cities that fall within San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, and Sonoma Counties in that region and 18 respondents from Minneapolis/St. Paul area of Minnesota. The majority of the remaining responses came from cities along the East Coast.

**Recruitment.** This study combined different nonprobability sample techniques including convenience sampling and the snowball method. Participants were recruited through social networking, such as Facebook and emailing contacts who may be in touch with LGBTQ parents, contacting LGBTQ parent groups, and speaking with various preschool teachers and programs requesting that they forward a flyer or parent letter (see appendix B) to those who they feel meet the inclusion criteria. The researcher first posted a recruitment letter on Facebook and request that contacts share this letter with those they feel will qualify in order to try and find participants from a larger geographic range. The researcher then emailed various preschool teachers, preschools and social workers who the researcher has connections with in the Bay Area as well as the Midwest providing them with the letter and flyer asking them to forward this information along to qualified participants and/or post the flyer at their school. Lastly, the researcher contacted parent agencies, such as the Berkley Parent's Network, Our Family Coalition, and Twins by The Bay and asked them to forward the letter and/or flyer to qualified participants. Participants who complete the survey were also encouraged to refer other qualified participants nationwide.

**Limitations of sample.** The cost of raising children in the San Francisco Bay Area are incredibly high, as are the cost of having children through sperm donation, surrogacy, or other

mean which some LGBTQ families must employ to have children. Therefore, concerns exist over possible limitations of the study sample surrounding participants being of higher socioeconomic status. Online surveys are used as the method of collecting data to allow for those who may not have the means, support, or time to meet for in person interviews to participate, hopefully allowing for a wider range of socioeconomic status, but also limiting participants to those with computer and internet access.

### **Data collection methods**

Participants answered a survey online through SurveyMonkey, which took less than 30 minutes to complete. Survey monkey provides a general link to the survey, participants can then click on the link and complete the survey anonymously, as no identifying information is stored by SurveyMonkey. The survey included both open and close-ended questions. (see attached Appendix C) Upon recruitment via social media, email, and other forms of outreach, interested participants logged on to the web address provided and find a welcome page, thanking them for their interest and asking them as a yes or no question if they identify as LGBTQ, and have a child who is currently in preschool or has been in the last year. If they answer yes to this question they are automatically sent to the Informed Consent. At the end of the Informed Consent there was a statement of agreement, which they checked “I agree” and were encouraged to print the consent form. If they agree they are sent to the research questionnaire. The following demographic details were collected: participants’ sexual orientation, whether they identify as transgender, and what city/town their child’s preschool was located in. Participants were asked to mark whether certain aspects shown in previous studies (Casper & Schultz, 1999; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011; Mercier & Harold, 2003) to facilitate inclusive environments were used at their child’s preschool, such as picture books featuring LGBTQ families and

Enrollment, intake, and other forms have blanks designated for parent/guardian instead of mother/father.

Respondents were then asked to answer short answer or yes/no questions about whether they felt they could be open about their family, whether they felt their family was welcome in the school community and classroom, what helped increase or decrease these feeling of inclusiveness, if they choose their child's school specifically because of it's approach to diversity, if they felt teachers were open to asking questions about their family structure and steps they took to increase the relationship and welcoming environment of their child's school. Survey responses will remain anonymous and confidential.

Data from surveys will be kept for at least three years according to Federal regulations. After three years, or whenever data is no longer being used, all data will be destroyed. Online surveys are used to combat the time and energy constraints that are often associated with parenting young children. The constraints of online surveys include the inability to ask follow up questions of participants which could lead to more rich and elaborate answers from participants.

### **Data analysis**

Demographic information was compiled and analyzed to see diversity and similarity among participants and to determine if themes or ideas are similar or different based on demographic categories. Demographic information was used to determine ways in which geographic location may affect participants' responses.

Qualitative data from short answer questions were analyzed using grounded theory and content analysis to review answers and code for themes and ideas that emerge in participants' answers. Themes and ideas were noted and responses that fit under certain themes were then be

grouped together. Survey responses were reviewed for ways in which participants make similar statements and where they differ in responses.

The next chapter, Findings, will provide the responses participants gave to survey questions. The ways in which respondents agree and disagree will be noted in the Findings chapter and will inform theories and recommendations developed in the Discussion chapter, which follows.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Findings**

#### **Major findings**

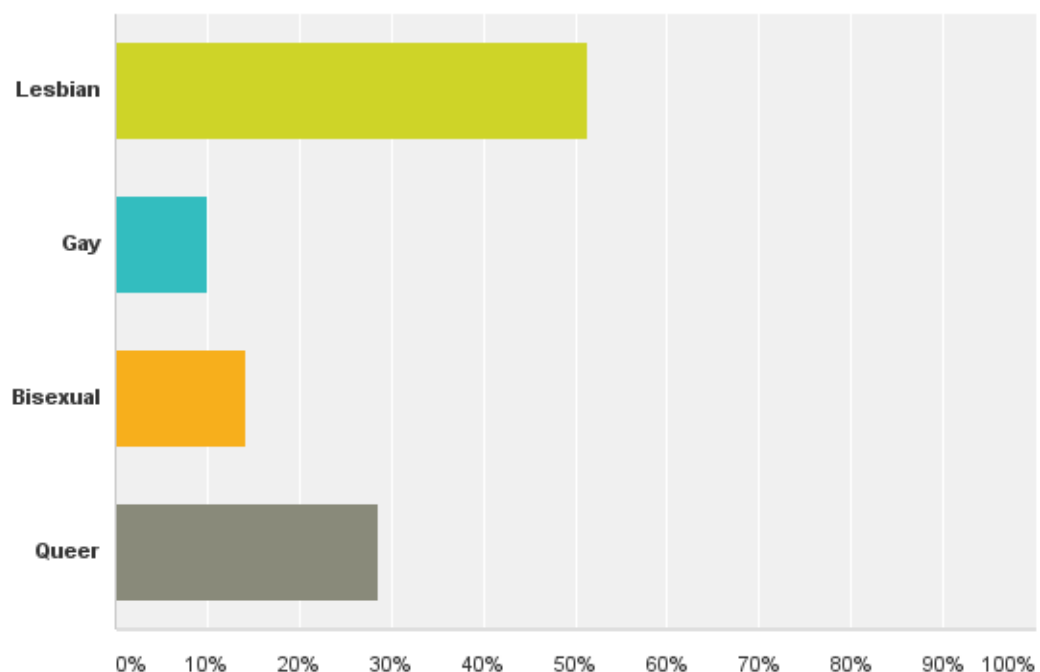
This research asked lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) identified parents about the ways in which they felt their child's preschool classroom was inclusive and not inclusive of their family structure. Participants were asked to remember whether specific items that have been stated to make families feel more welcome (Burt, Gelnaw, and Lesser, 2010; Casper & Schultz, 1999) were a part of their child's preschool as well as to comment on the reasons they chose their child's preschool. A majority of respondents felt that their child's preschool was inclusive of their family structure. These respondents often acknowledged an overall feeling of inclusiveness and a lack of feeling "othered" or gave examples of small moments in which they were aware of how welcome and included their family was at the preschool. Respondents that gave examples of instances in which they felt their family was not included or supported by the school environment often made efforts to fix these circumstances, bringing them up with teachers and administrators or offering additional materials or trainings for staff. These efforts to repair moments of exclusion were met with mixed results, sometimes changing ways things were handled in the future and sometimes received graciously but never followed through on. Teachers and other members of the school community are often greatly responsible for feelings of inclusiveness that LGBTQ parents reported, even despite a lack of LGBTQ representation in classroom materials, or LGBTQ friendly paperwork or forms. The reverse is also true in that teachers and other members of the school community could create

negative feelings of exclusion by not addressing homophobia and expressing explicitly, or through their behavior, a discomfort with certain topics such as adoption or sperm donation.

### **Disclosure of sexual orientation**

Seventy participants completed the survey, participants were asked to fill out one survey per family. The participants identified as various sexual orientations including, 36 lesbian identified, 7 gay identified, 10 bisexual identified, and 20 queer identified participants. Out of the 20 queer identified responses there is some overlap with other identities, two of these participants also marked lesbian, one also marked gay.

Figure 1: Terms used by participants to describe their sexual orientation



The majority of participants, 80% ( $n=56$ ) disclosed their sexual orientation to their child's preschool. Eleven of these fifty-six respondents, 20%, said there really was no need to disclose formerly as it was obvious, known, or assumed just by showing up as same sex parents.

Twenty-two people, 39% of those who stated they disclosed, said they disclosed formerly prior to the start of preschool, whether this was in an application, at a tour of the preschool, during the admission process, or during a family/school interview. Two of the participants described calling before pursuing further to disclose to make sure that it felt safe. Those who did disclose often did so to “everyone”, the director, or the director of the center and their child’s teacher.

Thirteen respondents, 19%, stated that they did not disclose their sexual orientation to preschool staff. The identity of these participants was split between 6 bisexual, 6 queer, and 1 lesbian identified participant. The most common response for why a parent chose not to disclose was because the teacher did not ask and the parent did not feel it was relevant. Four out of twelve people who did not disclose were not partnered and so heterosexuality was assumed. Two parents were bisexual with a different gender partner, which also resulted in an assumed heterosexual identity. One of the respondents who was not partnered at the time stated, “I did pick up my daughter with non-gender conforming friends, so they may have figured out.”

Only one participant marked that they did not disclose their orientation because it felt unsafe or uncomfortable to disclose this information, this respondent also marked that the teacher did not ask, and they did not feel it was relevant. This participant was both queer and transgender identified and skipped over questions about times in which the school and school community felt inclusive or not inclusive, so it is unknown as to what may have contributed to the feeling of discomfort.

### **Qualities that were important when looking for a preschool**

Participants were asked to describe what qualities were important when looking for a preschool. The following responses were given the most and are listed from most common to

least: having nurturing, caring, and professional teachers; the philosophy or approach of the school-including a strong emphasis on finding play-based preschool programs; and the school being diverse-whether related to race, class, or LGBTQ families. Logistical factors were the next common factor including: cost, location, and availability of open slots for their child.

When asked specifically whether diversity in general was an important factor in choosing the child's preschool 44 respondents, 74.6% of those who answered this question, said yes, many of these respondents clarified that racial diversity was just as important as they were unsure of the presence of other LGBTQ families at the time of enrollment. The respondents who did not feel that diversity was an important factor in their choice also clarified that their choices in preschool were limited due to availability of open slots, costs, or explicit homophobia at a small in home daycare center they had preferred.

### **Inclusive materials during enrollment and in the classroom**

Forty-six participants, 65.7% of the total, said forms for enrollment were labeled parent/guardian, parent1/parent 2, or in another gender neutral way. Fifteen participants, 23.4% of the 63 respondents who answered this question, stated that forms that were used for enrollment were labeled mother/father. There were a few respondents who marked both parent/guardian and mother/father, indicating that some forms may have been inclusive but this was not consistent across all paperwork. Thirty participants, 47% of those who answered, said there was a statement in enrollment or marketing materials expressing a commitment to diversity, even if not directed at LGBTQ parents, and 30% ( $n= 19$ ) of respondents to this question felt that materials or staff clearly indicated a desire to include LGBTQ families.

Eight participants, 13% of those who answered, marked that they did not remember the enrollment process and six parents, 9% of the full sample chose to skip this answer, indicating



the importance of keeping participants limited to those whose children were currently enrolled or had been in preschool within the last year as memories regarding specific aspects of the process may be limited.

Participants were also asked about the availability in their child's classroom of materials that have been found to be welcoming and inclusive to LGBTQ families including: books featuring LGBTQ families or themes, photos or posters that include LGBTQ families, teachers who supported or did not discourage gender non-conforming play, teachers allowing for or encouraging pretend play that was inclusive of alternative family structures, and whether Mother's Day and Father's Day were handled in a way that felt respectful and inclusive of all families.

Table 2: Inclusive classroom materials

Check all that you remember seeing in your child's classroom	<i>n</i>	%
Picture books featuring LGBTQ families	14	23.73
Poster or photos with various family structures, including LGBTQ families	20	33.9
Pretend play of various families and gender non conforming play welcome	48	81.36
Mother's Day and/or Father's Day treated sensitively	30	50.85
I did not often have the opportunity to spend time in my child's classroom	8	13.56

Forty-eight respondents, 81% of those who responded to this question, said play was non-gender conforming or open to various families, this was the most common answer, and often the only response given regarding inclusiveness in the classroom. Thirty respondents, 51% of those who answered, said that Mother's Day/Father's Day were handled in a way that felt sensitive and respectful of their family structure, though for some whose child may be in their first year of

preschool, these holidays had not yet occurred. Twenty respondents, 29% of those who responded, said that photos of LGBTQ families were present in their child's classroom, often these were provided by all families in the classroom at the request of the teachers. Only 14 respondents, 24% of those who responded, stated that they were aware of picture books featuring LGBTQ families being available in their child's classroom.

Most parents did not provide any materials featuring LGBTQ families to their child's classroom, though 11 did. The majority of respondents ( $n=8$ ) who did provide materials were lesbian-identified. Parents most often stated that they provided books related to same sex families, adoption, gender non-conforming kids or family photos at the request of teachers. All respondents who supplied classroom materials reported that they were well received or received with curiosity, though one parent stated that he was unsure of if the materials were actually put in use or if the importance of the materials was understood.

Outside of books and photos, families provided their child's teachers with an alternative family tree model, a professional development book on working with LGBTQ families. One family offered to pay for staff to attend a LGBTQ conference though no one took them up on this offer the first year, and only one staff member did the next year but only attend for half of the conference.

### **Teacher comfortable discussing family structure**

When asked whether their child's teacher felt comfortable discussing their family structure, 13 respondents, 19%, did not answer, and only one of the 57 parents who answered this question stated that teachers did not feel comfortable discussing their family structure. Sixty-seven percent of parents ( $n=47$ ) stated that all teachers felt comfortable discussing their

family structure. Nine respondents stated that some but not all teachers were comfortable with their family structure. When looking at lesbian only responses to this question, all lesbian respondents stated that all teachers were comfortable discussing their family structure.

### **Times parents felt school community was not inclusive**

Only 14 participants, twenty percent of the total participants, responded with examples of times in which they felt their family did not feel included. Moments in which parents felt they were not included were when “everything was mommy/daddy”, staff misused the names their child uses for their parents, misrepresentation of a family in a yearbook, only making one card for Mother’s Day when child had two mothers, and uncomfortable discussions about adoption, multi-racial families, and non-biological parents.

Parents also spoke about times when a teacher ignored exclusive or harmful behavior by other children. One parent’s memory of feeling like the teacher ignored and condoned hurtful behavior was, “when another child called me (lesbian parent) the father of my child”. This parent stated that “my child ended up doing a lot of the emotional labor for other children (discussions around who we were, who can marry who, who can wear what, etc.)” because teacher’s would not address the issue when it came up in the classroom.

Another theme that emerged in responses was that assumed heterosexuality by teachers often resulted in LGBTQ identified parents overhearing parents and/or teachers saying negative things about same gender parents. This was true for one bisexual parent in an opposite gender relationship and for a queer and trans-identified participant who is in an opposite gender relationship. One participant stated that,

“We are often read as straight, even though we both identify as queer...we’d see parents or teachers assume we were straight and both cis[gender] and say judgmental or thoughtless things about other lesbian or gay families.”

A third theme that came up from respondents was that something was a problem, but then it was fixed. Two parents discussed moments in which a teacher made comments that expressed an assumption of heterosexuality or enforcing gender norms for male students, and lost their job soon after. For example, one lesbian respondent stated,

“A substitute teacher made poor assumptions about our family during one day at pick up. I asked my child, ‘guess who is waiting for you in the car’ and the teacher filled in, ‘Is it daddy?!’ I corrected her and left. Never seen her in the classroom again!”

One parent also stated that forms had been father/mother but were changed the following year. Three respondents stated that their child had either not been invited to outside activities or other classmates did not come to their child’s birthday party. These parents all stated that school based events or certain school staffs felt welcoming, indicating that often the school environment felt welcoming but the community and other parents were what caused discomfort.

This was echoed by a different respondent who said the school was welcoming but one individual student had been the issue. This other student had said regarding one mom and her son Jude, “‘this is Jude and this is his daddy’, knowing full well that Jude does not have a daddy.” She stated that the teacher did not hear, the parent did not bring it up, and they think he learned this at home as their family “couldn’t feel more welcome, I feel like other children view it as just ‘his family’ not anything different.”

The last theme that emerged was that a different topic was as a bigger concern to them than parents LGBTQ identity, such as adoption, feeling left out during discussions about

labor/births, and being a single parent with a known donor status. Parents often spoke up about these issues mentioning their discomfort to the teachers or the director.

Eighteen participants, twenty six percent, explicitly stated that there had never been an instance they could remember where their family did not feel welcomed or included. Sixteen of these responses were from parents who also marked two things in application/enrollment materials that have shown to be inclusive, often gender neutral forms and materials that show a commitment to diversity, as well as marking that play in the classroom was accepting of gender neutral play and/or alternative family structures in play was supported. These participants all said as well that they felt the teachers were comfortable discussing their family structure.

Eighteen participants, twenty six percent of the total participants, skipped this question as well as the question regarding times in which they felt their school or school community was inclusive. There are various reasons why this may have been true, because they did not experience or could not remember these instances, did not feel comfortable remembering or commenting on these times, or due to other constraints such as time.

### **Times parents felt included**

Thirty-four percent of respondents ( $n=24$ ) talked about feeling included as a “non-issue” or stated that they felt included “all the time” as it was a part of every interaction. One even stated that the fact that it felt like such a non-issue was what made the school feel welcoming,

“We’re not tokenized in any way. We don’t feel like they have to learn about our family structure or work it into lesson to make others feel comfortable. We are treated just like any other parent by the staff.”

Often small moments had huge impacts on making parents feel included, from another parent stating “I can’t wait to meet your partner” to a 3 year old child seeing one parent in the parking lot and saying “that’s one of Sammy’s mommies”.

Two participants gave examples of gender non-conforming play being important in making them feel included. One teacher praised parents for supporting their son wearing dresses, another teacher helped children work through an argument where one child told a participants’ child they could not be a girl, and teacher’s supported the child being whoever or whatever they choose. Another teacher told a participant’s daughter to draw her family as she defined it, and then teachers praised her for it.

Approaching parents about how to handle Mother’s Day/ Father’s Day, or allowing time to make extra things for same sex parents was another time in which families felt included. Family themed lessons, books, or other materials featuring diverse families in regard to race and sexual orientation were also mentioned by participants as something that made them feel included.

Celebrating events in the family’s life, whether adoption, new babies, or marriage were all times in which inclusion happened. A few participants describe teachers bringing these events into the classroom for discussion and/or activities. One family invited preschool teachers to adoption ceremony because of their help, seeing teachers at adoption ceremony made another family at the school feel that all LGBTQ families are welcome. One respondent stated,

“As a person in an opposite-gender relationship, my family structure is welcomed all the time. But we have friends who are a family with two dads and the preschool staff were so helpful to them and their daughter, that the dads invited the preschool teachers to the adoption ceremony, and made me feel like they do welcome all families.”

Other common response include teacher's learning the names the child calls the parents and making an effort to use them properly, or being aware of an LGBTQ identified staff person also helped families felt welcome and included that the school.

In the following chapter the results of this study will be compared with previous studies reviewed in chapter two. Implications for practice and suggestions for creating more inclusive environments based on participants' responses will be noted in the following chapter as well.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Discussion**

This research asked LGBTQ identified parents about the ways in which they felt their child's preschool classroom was inclusive and/or not inclusive of their family structure. Participants were asked to remember whether specific items, such as picture books featuring LGBTQ families, that have are believed to make families feel more welcome (Casper & Schultz, 1999; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011; Mercier & Harold, 2003) were a part of their child's preschool as well as to comment on the reasons they chose their child's preschool. A majority of respondents felt that their child's preschool was inclusive of their family structure. These respondents often acknowledged an overall feeling of inclusiveness and a lack of feeling different than other parents or gave examples of small moments in which they were aware of how welcome and included their family was. Respondents that gave examples of instances in which they felt their family was not included or supported by the school environment often made efforts to fix these instances, bringing them up with teachers and administrators or offering additional materials or trainings for staff. These efforts to repair moments of exclusion were met with mixed results, sometimes changing ways things were handled in the future and sometimes received graciously but never followed through on. Teachers and other members of the school community are often largely responsible for feelings of inclusiveness that LGBTQ parents reported, even despite a lack of LGBTQ representation in classroom materials, or LGBTQ friendly paperwork or forms. The reverse is also true in that teachers and other members of the school community could create negative feelings of exclusion by not addressing homophobia and



expressing explicitly, or through their behavior, a discomfort with certain topics, such as teacher ignoring another child calling a lesbian respondent the “father” of her child or discomfort talking about adoption.

### **Overall feeling of inclusiveness**

Sixty seven percent ( $n=47$ ) of participants responded to the question asking for examples of ways in which their child’s school or school community felt inclusive. Out of those who did not respond to this question, six participants (46%) gave an example of the time they felt the school was not inclusive. The reason they choose to skip this question may have to do with the school not feeling inclusive or may be related to time and energy constraints of having small children. The school community may differ from the classroom teacher’s level of inclusiveness given that the community includes administrators, other staff, and parents. Participants were also asked specifically about their teacher’s comfort in discussing their family structure. Fifty-seven participants, 81% of the total participants, stated that “all” or “some but not all” of the teacher’s at their child’s school were comfortable discussing their family structure with them.

Mercier and Harold’s (2003) study of lesbian mothers in the Midwest found that 80% of their participants reported positive relationships with the school, though many respondents reported teachers not feeling comfortable discussing their family structure and some parents chose not to disclose their sexual orientation. While this research, did not ask any questions regarding the overall relationship with the school, 67% of participants in this study reported feelings of inclusiveness in relationship to the school community, and mirrors the 81% who felt that some or all teachers were comfortable discussing their family structure. If looking at only lesbian-identified participants of the current study, all lesbian-identified respondents stated that all of their child’s teachers were comfortable discussing their family structure and 72%

responded with examples of their child's school community felt inclusive. These findings may indicate a similarly large percentage of families having a positive relationship with their child's preschool.

Herbstreith, Tobin et al's (2013) study showed that college students in their study viewed lesbian and gay couples and families more negatively than heterosexual couples and families. Their study also found that gay males and gay headed families are viewed even more negatively than their lesbian counterparts. Responses in this study in which "some but not all teachers were comfortable" or teachers did not feel comfortable discussing the family structure came from gay or queer identified respondents, though the gender identity of queer participants is not known. The only parent who stated that they had been rejected from previous childcare options after disclosing their family structure identified as queer and in later questions described their family as "two moms", indicating continued discomfort with female-headed families as well.

### **Choosing a preschool**

Mercier and Harold (2003) study found that lesbian parents in their study valued diversity and tolerance around race ethnicity, and culture strongly when choosing their child's school, often driving further to attend a more diverse school. Similar to Mercier and Harold (2003)'s findings, 63% of the parents in this study stated that the school's approach to diversity, whether in general or specifically related to LGBTQ families, influenced their decision to send their child to the school. Of these responses, participants in this study clarified that racial diversity was just as important, and often they were not aware of other LGBTQ families at the school during enrollment. Contrary to Mercier and Harold's findings, no respondents stated that they were willing to drive further to seek out this diversity, and a few parents stated that location, cost,

availability, or other logistical issues were stronger factors than the school's commitment to diversity.

Goldberg and Smith's (2014) study of heterosexual, lesbian, and gay families found that the educational philosophy of the school was the most important factor when choosing a preschool for all families regardless of sexual orientation, for gay and lesbian families in their study the second most common factor was the school being gay friendly. In this study participants most commonly mentioned a desire for nurturing, caring, and professional teachers as the strongest desire in a preschool, followed by the educational philosophy, diversity, and logistical concerns. In looking for nurturing, caring, and professional teachers, parents may have hoped to increase the likelihood that the school would be welcoming, friendly, and supportive of their child no matter what their family structure.

### **Classroom materials**

Only twenty percent of participants of this survey ( $n=14$ ) stated that books featuring LGBTQ families or characters were available in their child's classroom. Teachers of these classrooms were not surveyed so it is unclear on the reason that so few respondents remembered seeing LGBTQ inclusive books in their child's school. A lack of availability of LGBTQ books could contribute to these results. Spence's (2000) study found that there are limited books available in public libraries and often these books were out of print so in those circumstances where they were damaged or lost they would not re-enter circulation. Teacher discomfort with whether these books are developmentally appropriate or a fear of retaliation by other parents or administrators was often repeated in the findings of Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2011), Casper and Schultz (1999), and Rowell (2007). It is unknown if this fear of retaliation or

discomfort with whether these books are developmentally appropriate contributed to the small number of LGBTQ books available since teachers were not studied.

As stated previously, LGBTQ books can be an important addition to all classrooms. A list of LGBTQ friendly books as well as a poster featuring LGBTQ families can be found through Our Family Coalition's website, a advocacy group in the San Francisco Bay Area for lesbian and gay parents. Teachers can also ask for and display, or have available for all students to look through, photos of the families of their students. Twenty nine percent of the respondents ( $n=20$ ) of this survey stated that teachers asked them for family photos and used them in the classroom.

Play that was welcoming of varying family structures and an encouragement, or lack of discouragement of gender non-conforming play was reported by 48 participants, 69% of all participants and mentioned by 81% of the participants who answered the question asking about things they witnessed in their child's classroom. Various studies, including Casper and Schultz (1999) point to the importance of play in the preschool classroom allowing children to learn and grow and develop more full, and hopefully in this case more inclusive, perspectives of the world around them. Gender non-conforming play was a topic that came up in two different participants examples of the school environment and community being inclusive, such as when a teacher pulled a parent aside to thank them for letting their son wear dresses and a teacher and administrator facilitating a discussion between two children around whether people had to be boys or girls. When asked about moments where the school felt like it was not inclusive, one parent stated that a teacher told a boy they could not have pigtails because they were for girls. The parent noted however that the teacher involved in this instance was dismissed soon after this

incident, indicating that a commitment to non-gender conforming play was important at that school.

### **Other ways to create more inclusive environments**

**Gender-neutral forms and communication.** All literature and information regarding creating inclusive environments encourage schools to ensure that enrollment forms, school materials, and letters home are inclusive of all families by replacing the use of mother/mom and father/dad with parents and guardians. Families come in all forms including relatives raising children, single parents, and same sex families and using the term “parent/guardian” on forms and letters home to ensure that all families feel included and welcomed. Twenty one percent of participants ( $n=15$ ) in this study said that forms at their child’s preschool were labeled “mother/father” and one parent when asked about times in which they felt their family was not included stated, “everything was mommy/daddy” another parent responded that “registration forms said mother and father.” This participant went on to state that registration forms at the school were changed to parent/guardian for the next year.

**Handle Mother’s Day and Father’s Day respectfully.** Forty-three percent of respondents ( $n=30$ ) stated that Mother’s Day and Father’s Day were either not addressed, or addressed in a way that felt respectful of their family structure. Mother’s Day and Father’s Day were also moments that came up when parents were asked about times they felt the school was inclusive or not inclusive. One parent said that their child was only allowed to make one card for Mother’s Day despite having two moms, and in regards to Father’s Day this parent stated “assuming this had to be a man, the school suggesting who it would be; rather than this coming to us”. When asked about moments when they felt included, a parent stated “they approached us about how to deal with Mother’s Day” another stated, “For Father’s Day prep I was asked how to

best handle it with my kid so she felt included in an emotionally safe way”, and two parents commented on their child being able to make two Mother’s Day gifts. Allowing for extra time for multiple presents, approaching families about how they handle these holidays, and being open to various ideas of who could receive a Mother’s Day or Father’s Day card were all seen as respectful approaches to these holidays.

Some parents in this study may not have responded to this question because as the survey was available from January to April and these holidays may not have occurred yet for children in their first year of preschool or children may not have been in preschool during summer when Father’s Day occurs.

**Learn the names children use for their parents.** LGBTQ families may use alternative forms of “mommy” or “daddy” specific to each particular parent. Schools should learn how family members address each other. This may include one parent being “mommy” and the other mother being “mama” in lesbian headed families, but various families develop their own nicknames and these should be asked about, acknowledged, and used appropriately. Ignorance or misuse of these labels was seen as not welcoming by respondents, and asking about these names and the proper use of, or attempt at proper use of, these names was reported as one of the welcoming moments parents experienced.

**Learn about all types of family structures and avenues for family creation.** Classrooms in which all types of families were discussed and treated as equally “normal” and routine were a repeated theme throughout this study. Parents were aware of the way in which same sex families were or were not supported and treated as equal not just in the way they were treated by teachers and staff, but also by the statements of their children and their children’s classmates. Parents responded when asked about feeling included by also talking about their

child's classmates. They felt it was noteworthy when another children said things like "oh, I have one mom and one dad" after hearing that they were their child's other mom, seeing them as "just our child's family", or saying "'oh that's one of his moms!'", like it was no big deal at all". One parent stated that they noticed their child referring to them as "my parents" or "parent mama" which they believed their child picked up from school.

A lack of respect for various family structures is also noticed. One respondent felt that their child ended up "baring the emotional labor...discussing who we were, who can marry who, who can wear what, etc." with other children in their class.

Adoption, sperm donation, and surrogacy are avenues used by various people to start a family. LGBTQ families rely on these methods in higher percentages to create their families than their heterosexual cisgender counterparts. Families in this study reported that their child's adoption, feeling left out of labor/birth discussions, their child's known sperm donor, or having a teacher refer to a sperm donor as the child's "dad" in front of the child were instance of feeling the classroom was not inclusive. Books about adoption and bi-racial or multiracial families were also ways in which parents contributed to the classroom environment to help it feel more inclusive.

**Be aware of dynamics of the school community.** Other parents' reactions were concerns mentioned by families in both Mercier and Harold's (2003) and Casper and Schultz's (1999) survey and included both a fear of and actual experiences with parent's saying negative things, not engaging with lesbian and gay families, or not attending birthday parties or other events of children with lesbian and gay headed families. Participants of this study also indicated that the parent community of the school was an important piece of whether they felt included. One parent reported that she felt included when another parent said, "I can't wait to meet your

partner”. Receiving invitations for birthday parties was reported as a time when multiple parents felt included; children from the school not attending their child’s birthday party was a time when three parents felt the school was not inclusive.

### **Implications for social workers**

School social workers and those who work in preschools, such as state funded pre-k programs and Head Start, can use this information to help create inclusive school communities by implementing strategies used here with the collaboration of teachers and administrators at their school. Social workers working with members of LGBTQ families can also use this information to inform their understanding of stressors these families may face or have already tackled. Participants of this survey often advocated for more inclusive environments by informing staff of these sort of issues or providing books, photos, or other information for the school. Social workers can support their clients in their efforts by advocating for their children and families. Many parents reported that their family structure was a “non-issue” at their child’s school and for their child’s classroom indicating an openness of young children to accept all families easily. It is not known whether this inclusiveness will stay with children as they grow older, but it does bring hope that acceptance of different family structures will persist and possibly result in reduced homophobia in future generations.

### **Strengths and limitations**

This study included bisexual and transgender voices, which are often left out of lesbian and gay studies. The number of bisexual and transgender participants was low ( $n=10$ ,  $n=4$ ) however they provided a perspective on ways in which their experiences may differ. One bisexual identified participant who is currently partnered in an opposite gender relationship and one transgender and queer identified respondent who is assumed to be cisgender and is in an



opposite gender relationship, spoke of the way in which teachers and parents assume heterosexuality and therefore may make homophobic or other derogatory statements regarding LGBTQ parents in their presence.

The researcher chose to include the term “queer” and a comment box to allow for respondents to self-identify due to the researchers own knowledge of queer being a preferred identity for some in the LGBTQ community. This choice was made purposely due to the researcher’s value on self-naming despite that it may mask an even larger percentage of female identified same-sex parents participating in the study or the presence of more male identified same-sex parents responses. Female same-sex parents tend to be overrepresented in research studies on same sex families and make up over half of this survey.

The cost of raising children in the San Francisco Bay Area is incredibly high, as are the cost of having children through sperm donation, surrogacy, or other mean which some LGBTQ families must employ to have children. Therefore, concerns exist over possible limitations of the study surrounding participants being of higher socioeconomic status. Online surveys are used as the method of collecting data to allow for those who may not have the means, support, or time to meet for in person interviews to participate, hopefully allowing for a wider range of socioeconomic status, but also limiting participants to those with computer and internet access.

Social workers are trained to view their clients in relation to the environment in which they live. The number of LGBTQ families that are visible in schools and our communities has increased due to reduced stigma around these identities. This study serves as a window into the experiences of some LGBTQ headed families that can help inform the way we understand their experiences in starting school. As social justice advocates, social workers should take steps to

create inclusive environments to ensure that all children and families are treated equally and are not subject to increased stress.

### **Direction for future research**

As mentioned previously, limited research has been done with bisexual participants and transgender identified participants, further research into their experiences and how they may differ from other members of the LGBTQ community is an important area of further study. Gay fathers specifically have also been understudied, as lesbian mothers are often overrepresented in research samples, including this sample. Further research that uses both the parent's perspective and their child's teachers perspective could help illuminate the efforts teachers are making to create more inclusive environment and the effects of these efforts on families. Longitudinal studies that follow families from preschool throughout later school years may help show the impact of inclusive classrooms on reducing homophobia or stigma in later years.

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## Appendix A: HSR Approval Letter



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**School for Social Work**  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 11, 2014

Carla Haggard

Dear Carla,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.  
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Pearl Soloff, Research Advisor

## **Appendix B: Recruitment Tools**

Dear Agency/School/ListServ representative (Our Family Coalition, various preschools, ListServ for Transgender Community),

My name is Carla Haggard, a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am writing to ask your help with completing my Master's thesis by promoting my brief 30 minute electronic survey on your experiences of inclusiveness, or lack of inclusiveness, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) families in their child's preschool. Their responses could give insight as to how professionals and agencies like yours can better serve these families.

Parents are eligible to participate in my study if they are a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer identified parent of a child currently in preschool, or was in preschool within the last year. Participating in this study entails filling out a simple anonymous online survey one time that should take less than 30 minutes.

If you will grant permission to recruit at your school/agency/listserv, please respond stating your written permission and share the following link to my thesis survey with any potential participants along with the attached letter to parents and/or display the recruitment flyer in a location in which potential parents may view it:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LGBTQpreschoolparents>

If you have any questions about my research or the nature of participation, please feel free to reply to contact me at (email was included but deleted for confidentiality purposes) or by phone (number was included but deleted for confidentiality purposes).

Thank you for your time and interest.

Carla Haggard

MSW Candidate 2014

Dear Parent,

My name is Carla Haggard, a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. I am writing to ask your help with completing my Master's thesis by participating in a brief 30 minute electronic survey on your experiences of inclusiveness, or lack of inclusiveness, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) families in your child's preschool.

You are receiving this because you identify as an LGBTQ-identified parent and have a child who is currently attending preschool, or has attended preschool in the last year. By participating in this research and sharing information about your experiences you are helping to determine what helps LGBTQ families feel included in the preschool classroom, and what may lead to feelings of exclusion in these classrooms. Your responses could influence the ways child, family, and school social workers can advocate for a more truly supportive environment for those they serve.

You are eligible to participate in my study if you are a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer identified parent of a child currently in preschool, or was in preschool within the last year. If you meet these criteria, participating in this study entails filling out a simple anonymous online survey one time that should take less than 30 minutes. I encourage you to please follow this link to my thesis survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LGBTQpreschoolparents>

If you know of other potential participants, I would greatly appreciate you forwarding this letter to other LGBTQ identified parents who meet the above criteria.

If you have any questions about my research or the nature of participation, please feel free to reply to contact me at (email was included but deleted for confidentiality reasons) or by phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for your time and interest.

Carla Haggard

MSW Candidate 2014



# **Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Parents with a child in preschool during the past year.**



I would like to invite you to participate in a brief anonymous online survey regarding your experiences in your child's preschool. By sharing information about your experiences, you could help influence the ways child, family, and school social workers can advocate for a more truly supportive environment for those they serve.

Please follow this link to the survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LGBTQpreschoolparents>

Carla Haggard, MSW Candidate 2014, Smith College School for Social Work

## **Appendix C: Survey Tool**

## qualifications

**\* 1. Do you identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer and have a child who is currently in preschool or has attended preschool in the past year?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

## informed consent

.....

Title of Study: What are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) parents perceived experiences of inclusiveness in their child's preschool classroom?

Investigator(s):

Carla Haggard, MSW candidate 2014, Smith College School for Social Work

.....

### Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study of LGBTQ parents' perceived experiences of inclusiveness in their child's preschool classroom.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you identify as LGBTQ and have a child who is currently in, or has been within the last year, a preschool classroom.
- Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

### Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to understand the ways in which LGBTQ preschool parents feel that their family is, or is not, welcomed and included in their child's preschool.
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master's degree in social work from Smith College.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented.

### Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:  
Participate anonymously in a brief online survey about your experiences at your child's preschool. This survey should take less than 30 minutes to complete. You will be asked to provide demographic information regarding your sexual orientation, whether you identify as transgender, the geographic location of your child's preschool. You will then be asked to answer a set of closed ended or short answer questions, regarding your experiences at your child's preschool, including questions such as, whether you felt your child's teacher was comfortable with your family's structure.

### Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- Participating in this study may remind you of upsetting memories of homophobia or feeling excluded. I encourage you to look into nationwide agencies doing work around creating welcoming K-12 schools including the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) at [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org) and Human Right Campaign's Welcoming Schools Project at [www.welcomingschools.org](http://www.welcomingschools.org). Children of Lesbian and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE) can also be a great resource and network for children of LGBTQ headed families.

### Benefits of Being in the Study

- The benefits of participation are having your voice heard around the ways in which preschool classrooms, often children and family's first entrance to the school system, can create inclusive or not inclusive environments for LGBTQ families.
- The benefits to social work and society in general are: potentially influencing the ways in which child and family social workers, as well as school social workers, can advocate for a more truly supportive environments for those they serve.

### Confidentiality

- This study is anonymous. I will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity. The survey website does not provide me with your name, email, or other identifying information and will only provide the answers you give anonymously. There will be no way to identify individual participant's responses.

### Payments/gift

You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

• The decision to participate in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the study without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to not answer and skip any question, as well as to withdraw completely at any time while completing survey. Due to the anonymous nature of the study, responses are not connected to identifying information, and therefore I won't be able to remove your responses after you have completed and submitted the survey when you click "submit" at the end of the questionnaire. Anonymous group data from survey will be saved and stored in a locked file for 3 years, or longer if needed.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

• You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Carla Haggard at (email deleted for thesis submission) or by telephone at (phone number deleted for thesis submission). If you would like a summary of the study results you may contact me and provide me with an email address, and a summary will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

**\*2. CLICKING AGREE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO VOLUNTEER AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT FOR THIS STUDY, AND THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE. PLEASE PRINT A SCREEN SHOT OF THIS PAGE FOR YOUR RECORDS.**

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Do not agree

**3. Do you identify as transgender?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Other (please specify)

**sexual orientation**

**4. How do you describe your sexual orientation?**

- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Queer

Other (please specify)

**3. Do you identify as transgender?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Other (please specify)

sexual orientation

**4. How do you describe your sexual orientation?**

- ☐ Lesbian  
☐ Gay  
☐ Bisexual  
☐ Queer

Other (please specify)

**5. What city was the preschool in which your child attended located?**

disclosure

**6. Did you disclosure your sexual orientation to your child's preschool?**

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

yes to disclosure

**7. When and to whom did you disclose your orientation at your child's preschool?**

no to disclosure

**8. What informed your decision to not disclose your sexual orientation (check all that apply)**

- ☐ Teacher did not ask
- ☐ I was not partnered at time so school was unaware/assumed heterosexuality
- ☐ I felt it was not relevant
- ☐ It felt unsafe or uncomfortable disclosing this information

Other (please specify)

**enrollment**

**9. Check any of the below which were part of the enrollment/application process of your child's preschool**

- ☐ Forms asking for parent information were specifically labeled "father/mother"
- ☐ Forms asking for parent information were specifically labeled "parent/guardian",
- ☐ "parent 1/parent 2", or in another gender neutral way
- ☐ Paperwork, parent handbook, marketing materials, or other school materials geared toward prospective, new, or current parents included a statement about a desire for, or commitment to, diversity, even if not specifically directed at LGBTQ families.
- ☐ Materials or faculty/staff clearly indicated a desire to include LGBTQ families in their community.
- ☐ I don't remember

Other (please specify)

**10. What qualities were important to you when in the process of choosing a preschool?**

**11. Were you aware of other LGBTQ families at the preschool you chose?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**12. Did the school's approach to diversity (whether in general, or specifically LGBTQ families) influence your decision in where you sent your child to preschool?**

## classroom materials

### 13. Check all that you remember observing in your child's preschool classroom

- ☐ Picture books featuring LGBTQ families
- ☐ Poster or photos displaying various family structures, including LGBTQ families.
- ☐ Encouragement of, or lack of discouragement of, "non-gender conforming" play or play that allowed for various family structures (ex: children allowed to wear clothes or play in activities that socially may be gendered activities or pretend "families" can include two moms, two fathers, etc.)
- ☐ Mother's Day and/or Father's Day were either not addressed, or addressed in a way that felt respectful of our family structure.
- ☐ I did not often have the opportunity to spend time in my child's preschool classroom

### 14. Did you ever supply your child's preschool classroom with books or other materials featuring LGBTQ families?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Other (please specify)

## material response

### 15. What types of materials did you provide and how did teachers react?

## inclusive

### 16. Did you feel that your child's teacher was comfortable discussing your family structure?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Some teachers, but not all

**17. Please describe any times you felt your child's school, classroom, teachers, or school community were NOT inclusive or supportive of your family structure.**

**18. Please describe any times, events, or activities in which you felt your family's structure was welcomed by your child's school, classroom, teachers, or school community.**